Gables Coliseum finally may get historic status

City board to vote today

By ANGELO FIGUEROA
Herald Staff Writer

After deferring the issue for more than six months, the Historic Preservation Board in Coral Gables will decide today if the Coliseum will be designated a historic structure.

"We had an agreement with the owners to delay designation so that they could market the Coliseum," said Ellen Baum, board chairwoman. "It is definitely one of the most notable buildings built by George Merrick at the start of Coral Gables."

The board is scheduled to vote at 4 p.m. today in the City Commission Chambers, and for many it will be a special day. Historic designation means the city has to approve any significant interior or exterior alterations.

The 61-year-old landmark at 1500 Douglas Rd. opened in 1927 as an opera house. Since then it has been everything from a sports arena, to a bowling alley, to Holiday on Ice skating rink to a health club.

"The designation is extremely important because it would give us some control as to what happens to the building," said Ellen Uguccioni, historic preservation administrator for Coral Gables. "Our first concern is that it is preserved, because it has both architectural and historical significance."

The Coliseum's owners, Harold Vineberg and Jeffrey Weiss, are trying to lease the building or sell it for close to its market price of $11 million.

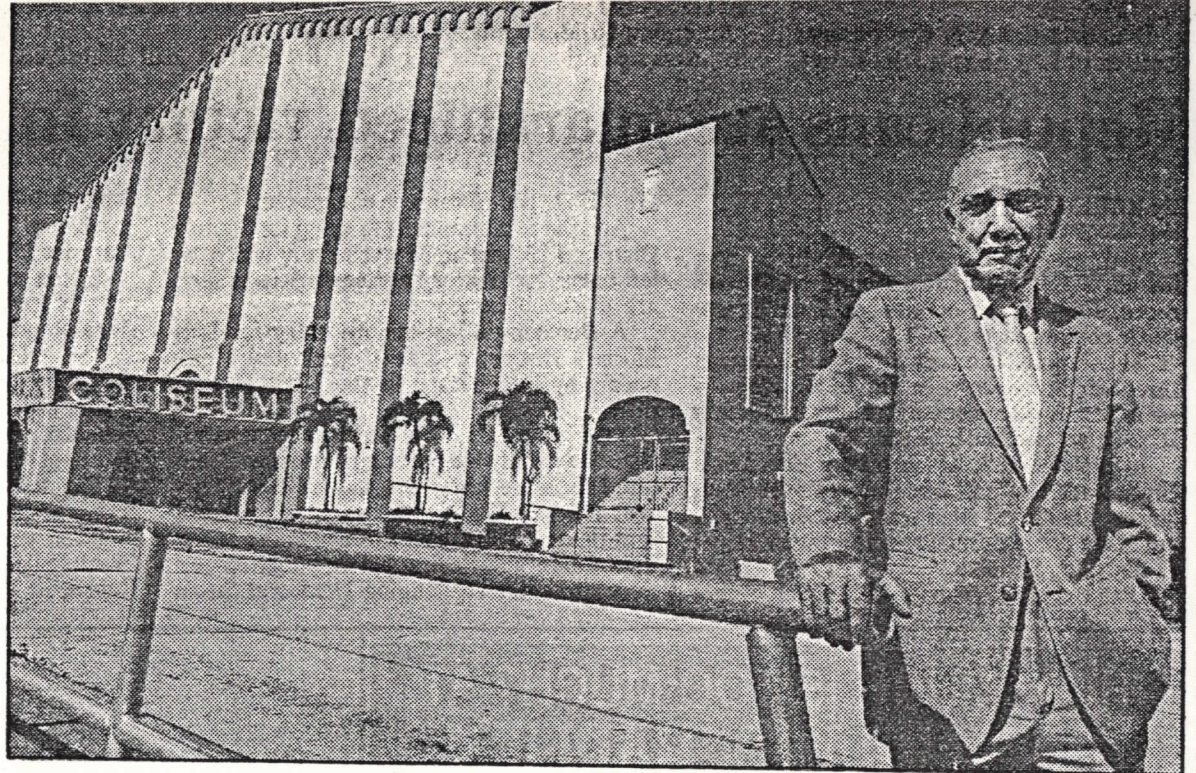
"I think it would make a great headquarters for a bank, or a department store," said Vineberg, who has owned the building since 1957. "It's so versatile."

Other ideas for the Coliseum include converting it into an apartment complex, film studio, retail mall or car dealership, said Pamela Stewart Paul, a broker associate with Kenneth Weston & Associates, which is in charge of sales and leasing for the building.

"We're not just looking at the highest bidder," Paul said. "Who proposes the best use for the property is also a major consideration. It would be a shame if the public did not have the opportunity to enjoy it."

Paul estimates that the Coliseum will be leased or sold by mid-fall, an event that will probably sadden her.

"This place is unlike anything else I've ever worked with," Paul said. "I turned down a great summer job in Miami Lakes, where I could have worn jeans all day long and had my horse around. But I came and took a look at the Coliseum and I fell in love. I knew I had to be involved in the project."



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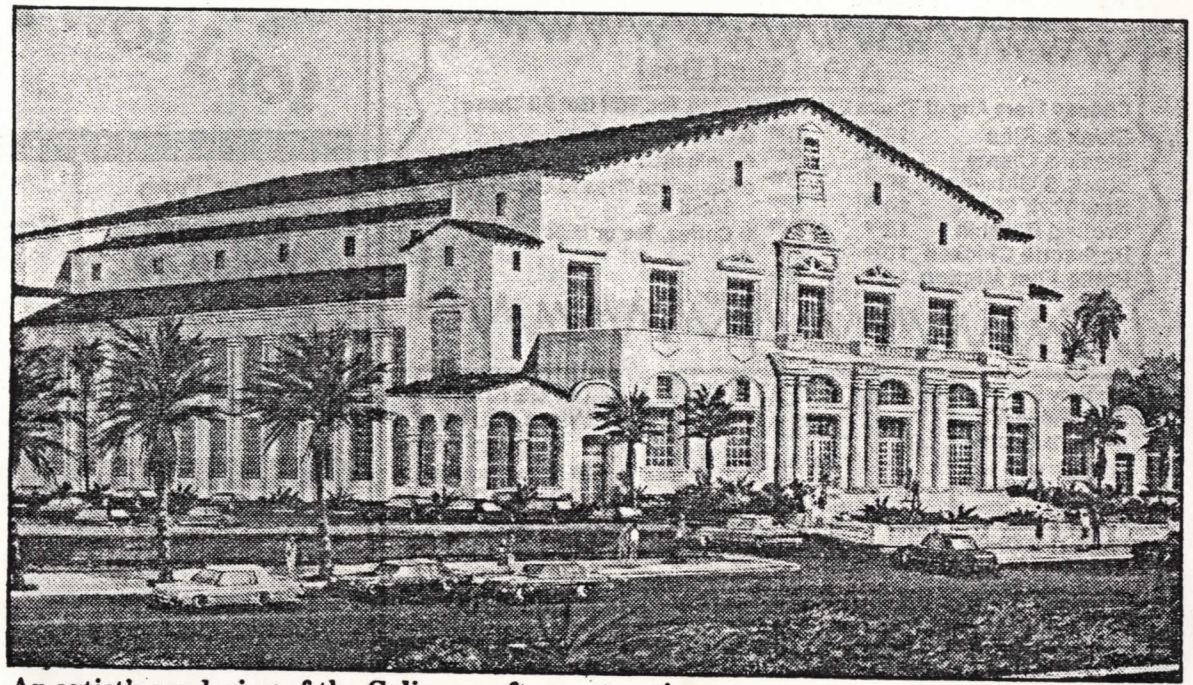
Harold Vineberg is co-owner of the 61-year-old building. 'I think it would make a great headquarters for a bank, or a department store,' he says.



An artist's rendering of the Coliseum after restoration.